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By Pete Spanos

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Charles F. Bass, the Peterborough Republican who represented the concerns of New Hampshire's 2nd congressional district in Washington for six terms before being unseated in 2006, made a series of stops in Sullivan County yesterday in his former capacity – having taken back the seat in 2010.

Bass' mission, according to a press statement issued before his arrival, was to "meet with local officials, business owners and employees to learn how Congress can make it easier for the private sector to grow and create jobs."

Bass began the day meeting with town officials and members of several environmental groups, including the Lake Sunapee Protection Association, in Sunapee. From there, he appeared in Newport – speaking to seniors at Maple Manor and touring New England Outdoor Furnace – before a brief tour of Structal-Bridges, makers to steel bridges and structural bearings in Claremont.

"I'm not here because I need to be a congressman," Bass told the Newport seniors. "I'm over that. I came back because I care about this country and I see it going in the wrong direction. I came back to make decisions – but compassionate decisions – so we can get back to some sense of prosperity and security."

"I'm not in it to win elections anymore, but to solve problems."

Earlier, in Sunapee, Bass, who sits on the House Energy and Commerce Committee (and its telecommunications subcommittee) discussed his opposition to Ethanol subsidies, fluorescent light bulb mandates and how to bring broadband capacity and technology grants to the area.

In three short, sparsely-attended public forums, Bass showed a firm command of energy-related and budgetary issues, as well as a deep knowledge of the particular concerns of his district, including Sullivan County's.

Speaking to Sunapee Selectman Chair William Roach on the subject of how the federal government could save money, specifically in the area of defense waste, Bass mentioned the large amounts of U.S. dollars "stolen in Afghanistan."

"It's time to get out of that country," Bass said, without equivocation.

At Newport's Salt Hill Pub, Bass honored retired Newport town manager Dan O'Neill with an American flag for his 23 years of public service before greeting seniors at the independent living facility.

Questions from the older set were tough, centering on Medicare and the current debt crisis. One

resident chastised the congressman for his recent vote for the debt limit increase.

"It was one of those votes where you're damned if you do, and damned if you don't," said Bass. "Half the people said they didn't like it because there were no tax increases, the other half say we didn't cut enough spending.

"And that's why I support a balanced budget amendment," Bass said. "The voters spoke last fall and I don't think they wanted another trillion dollars of stimulus spending. The battleship of the United States government is hard to turn, and I went back to D.C. to try and turn it and the conversation has changed, and the ship is turning."

Bass also credited his state for having half (4.8 percent) the national unemployment average and offered a reason why.

"We are successful because we are exporters and we depend on trade for a quarter of our jobs," he said. "We have a great diversity in our workforce, so if one segment of our economy suffers there is not a domino effect in the other job sectors."

When the conversation came to just how Washington could be changed, the subject of money in politics inevitable arose. Bass, a long-time proponent of campaign finance reform, told the Sunapee group that he would "work hard to build a war chest" for the 2012 election, but that "out-of-state special interest money on both sides is bigger than I or anyone else can combat."

Bass, who was methodical in keeping with his itinerary, ended his day with stops at Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site in Cornish and at the site of the future Great River Co-op development in Walpole.